Nova Scotia Department of Community Services

Statement of Mandate 2014-2015

NOVA SCOTIA CANADA

Table of Contents

1.0 Our Mandate 3

2.0 Our Priorities 5

3.0 Budget Context 12

4.0 Performance Measures 13

NOVA SCOTIA CANADA

Message from the Minister and Deputy Minister

On behalf of the Department of Community Services, we are pleased to present the 2014-2015 Statement of Mandate.

Community Services promotes the independence, self-reliance and security of the people we serve and strengthens the communities that support them. Our programs and services weave a secure social safety net for Nova Scotians who are experiencing challenges in their lives.

Toward that end, we are developing a new benefit structure for Employment Support and Income Assistance guided by positive outcomes for clients.

We are strengthening the capacity of community organizations to help people find and connect with needed supports, including outreach services for women and children and Family Resource Centres.

Community Services is providing leadership to develop the province's first Sexual Violence Prevention Strategy, in consultation with diverse organizations.

The Department is continuing to transform services for persons with disabilities, in support of a person-directed and community-focused roadmap. In 2014-15, Community Services will establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee to provide leadership in creating accessibility legislation.

We are committed to helping Nova Scotians to achieve their fullest potential.

Regards,

Joanne Bernard
Minister, Department of Community Services

Lynn Hartwell
Deputy Minister, Department of Community Service

NOVA SCOTIA CANADA

1.0 Our Mandate

The primary responsibility of the Department of Community Services is to ensure the basic needs of individuals and families are met by providing financial support to persons in need and by protecting children and adults at risk. Most of the Department's expenditures are in the form of direct payments to clients in need of financial assistance and to service providers who provide residential, vocational, preventive, and protection services to children and families, and persons with disabilities. Together, these programs and services form a secure and predictable social safety net for vulnerable Nova Scotians.

Our Mission

The Department of Community Services is committed to a sustainable social support system that promotes the independence, self-reliance, and security of the people we serve. This will be achieved through excellence in service delivery, leadership, and collaboration with our partners.

Our Strategic Outcomes

Community Services has set a strategic course guided by a number of key outcomes:

- To enable more Nova Scotians to live independent of income assistance
- To improve opportunities for social inclusion for persons with disabilities.
- To improve the educational, justice, health, social and economic determinants of children in care and children of income assistance recipients
- To improve the sustainability of the social service system enabling appropriate responses to societal and demographic change.

NOVA SCOTIA CANADA

Our Legislative Authority

Services are delivered under the authority and direction of the following legislation:
Adoption Information Act
Children and Family Services Act
Disabled Persons Commission Act
Employment Support and Income Assistance Act
Homes for Special Care Act
Protection of Persons in Care
Senior Citizen's Financial Aid Act
Social Assistance Act
Social Workers Act
Youth Secretariat Act

Our Programs

Each year, the Department provides direct services to approximately 200,000 Nova Scotians, approximately 20 percent of the provincial population. Services are broad in scope and include, but are not limited to:

- basic and special needs for over 44,000 people who benefit from the Income Assistance program,
- employment supports for some 8,000 income assistance recipients,
- additional financial support through the poverty reduction credit program to almost 15,000 income assistance recipients,
- child benefits for some 38,000 children of low-income families,
- property tax rebates for almost 15,000 senior households,
- 25,800 Child Abuse Register searches,
- 10,000 referrals made to Child Protection Services,
- support to nearly 700 foster families
- placement and case management services for over 5,000 persons with disabilities,
- licensing services for about 400 child care facilities, 330 homes and facilities providing residential care for persons with disabilities; and some 24 facilities providing residential and other support to children in care
- grant management, and funding support to over 600 service providers and community based organizations

More information on the Department's programs and services can be found on the Department's website, http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/.

2.0 Our Priorities

Below is a description of the Department's 2014-2015 priorities to help vulnerable Nova Scotians achieve their fullest potential.

Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA)

2.1 Priority: Improved Access to Essential Special Needs

In addition to financial assistance with the cost of food, clothing and shelter, the ESIA program makes provision for the granting of assistance to cover a broad range of medical, health, employability, shelter and emergency situations. These are referred to as special needs. There are 34 different categories of special needs, some with multiple provisions, which may be provided with the prior approval of staff.

Over the past decade the number of clients in receipt of special needs has increased from 50% to 70% of the caseload, with medical special needs accounting for almost 50% of all special needs. Yet access to special needs, especially medical items essential to a person's health, continues to present challenges for recipients and staff alike.

In 2014-2015, in response to the needs of Income Assistance recipients, the *ESIA Regulations* will be amended to provide a clearer and simpler process for requesting essential medical items or services that may be funded as a special need through the ESIA program.

2.2 Priority: Towards a New ESIA Benefit Structure

In October 2012, the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario submitted its report to government, concluding

"A simple and effective benefit structure is critical to helping people exit social assistance for employment, and to providing income support for those who cannot work. The costs of complexity are simply too high. Complexity creates barriers to employment and occupies caseworkers' time with the administration of myriad unnecessary rules."

Nova Scotia, like Ontario, and its other counterparts across the country, has an administratively complex structure of rates, allowances and special needs. Benefits are not linked to client outcomes, be they employment, training, independence or inclusion. Yet approximately 4.7

percent of Nova Scotia's population – 44,000 people – are dependent, in whole or in part, on income assistance to help meet their basic needs – food, shelter, and clothing. Some 31% of these people have been in receipt of income assistance for five or more years and have little hope that a better life is in their future.

Over the past year, the Department has been completing a comprehensive review of the current benefit structure, approaches in other jurisdictions, and emerging best practices to underpin the development of a new benefit structure – one which enables client independence and social inclusion.

In 2014-2015, the Department will continue this work and engage with clients and stakeholders to inform the development of a new benefit structure based on outcomes, that achieves a balance among five objectives:

- adequacy of rates, especially for long-term recipients
- fairness between income assistance recipients and low-income working Nova Scotians
- enabling and making work pay
- transparency and accessibility
- administrative simplicity.

2.3 Priority: Better Service to ESIA Clients

Across government, departments are looking at ways to provide better service to Nova Scotians. Community Services as the direct provider of financial assistance to citizens in need, is looking at ways to improve delivery of its ESIA Program.

Staff and clients alike want to see improvement in the way the program is delivered: less paperwork, better and more timely access to information and services, consistent application of policy and procedure, and a more holistic, client focused approach to providing support.

In 2014-2015, the Department will begin a multi-year initiative to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its ESIA Program:

- Adopt a risk based approach to help simplify processes and to ensure that resources are used effectively;

- Implement regional and/or provincial delivery structures for routine, transaction based services, and utilize technology, telecommunications and process improvement to simplify work for staff and improve access for citizens and clients;

- The Department will continue to work with LAE to inform the implementation of a seamless continuum of employment related programs and services.

Family and Community Supports

2.4 Priority: Amendments to the *Children and Family Services Act*

Although the *Children & Family Services Act* provides a solid foundation for the protection and best interests of children, it is 24 years old and no longer reflects best practices and today's family structures.

In 2014-2015, the Department will be completing its research, analysis and consultation to support amendments to the *Children & Family Services Act,* with a plan to introduce new legislation in the Fall of 2015.

2.5 Priority: Strengthening Community Capacity

A sense of community, of fitting in, and having a network of support - these are key determinants of a person's health, strength and ability to cope with difficult circumstances. It is true for all of us, but carries a greater importance for vulnerable populations. All too often, disadvantaged populations have nowhere to turn when help is needed. Strengthening the capacity of community organizations to help people find and connect with the supports they need is key to building and strengthening the fabric of community life.

2.5.1 Increased Funding for Family Resources Centres

The Department recognizes the important role Family Resource Centres play in the lives of Nova Scotia families. These Centres offer support in many areas including: parenting, child development, pre-natal care, housing, family relationships, family support, food security, health and wellness, personal and skill development, education, and crisis management.

The Centres have reported an increase in demand from families for services, as well as an increase in the complexity and range of issues facing families. Research has demonstrated that

investment in prevention and early intervention with at risk families has resulted in cost savings in other, more costly programs, such as child welfare, mental health, and the justice system.

In 2014-2015, Government has committed to investing an additional $2 million in funding to the Family Resource Centres. This investment will ensure the Centres have funding to provide innovative programs and services aimed at meeting community needs and the needs of families and children in those communities.

2.5.2 Outreach Services for Women and Children

In 2012 in Nova Scotia, there were 3,255 victims of spousal and intimate partner violence, (domestic violence) who reported the incident to the police. The majority of these victims - 2,539, or 78% - were women. The incidence of domestic violence is known to be much higher as some 70% of incidents go unreported to police.

Transition Houses and Second Stage Housing provide a continuum of services for women and children leaving domestic violence situations, from a short-term emergency shelter to independent living in a safe and supportive housing environment in the community.

Women's Centres work to improve the well-being and economic status of women and adolescent girls through the provision of information, programs, and supports designed to address the complexity of issues in their lives.

In 2014-2015, the Department will invest an additional $500,000 for Transition Houses, Second Stage Housing, and Women's Centres programming. This funding will:

- help ensure shelter and outreach services are available to women and children when they need them
- strengthen the continuum of support for women and children in areas of the province with the highest service demands and occupancy rates
- address the increased demand for supports for women and children with varied and complex needs.

2.5.3 Nova Scotia's First Sexual Violence Strategy

Sexual Violence is a public health and social justice issue with many devastating impacts on many individuals, families, and communities across Nova Scotia. The prevalence of sexual violence incidents in Nova Scotia is difficult to quantify. In 2009, Statistics Canada reported that 88 percent or close to 9 in 10 sexual assaults were not reported to police.

In 2014-2015, the Department will lead the development of Nova Scotia's first Sexual Violence Strategy which includes a funding commitment of $2 million. The focus of the strategy will be to improve services and supports for victims and survivors and to develop and implement prevention efforts in the long term.

The Department will be engaging with victims and survivors, and community organizations to help ensure the strategy reflects a broad and diverse community perspective.

2.5.4 Supportive Housing for Youth

One of the most vulnerable populations in Nova Scotia is homeless youth. As such, the Department partners with several community organizations to ensure there is housing available for homeless youth.

In 2014-2015, the Department will provide $350,000 in annual funding to the Supportive Housing Youth Focus Team (SHYFT). This funding will enable SHFYT to continue to serve the needs of homeless and at-risk youth in the Yarmouth/Tri-county area through 24/7 residential housing and outreach services.

2.6 Priority: Multi-Year Funding

Government is committed to implementing multi-year funding for not-for-profit organizations. A shift in funding from the traditional annual grant to a multi-year regime will necessitate a larger examination of the current governance approach.

In 2014-2015, in collaboration with community-based organizations, building on the work of the Family & Youth Services Unit, the Department will conduct a Grants Process Review to improve consistency, transparency and accountability and to ensure a strong governance framework exists. This framework will provide clarity around eligibility and funding for services; outcomes and results; service standards and agreements; as well as monitoring and reporting requirements.

Services for Persons with Disabilities Program (SPD)

In 2014-2015, the Department will continue the transformation of the SPD program.

2.7 Priority: Implementation of Individualized Funding Demonstration Projects

An important component of SPD transformation is the creation of a system that is person-directed and community focused.

In 2014-2015, families will be able to develop their own innovative supporting housing solutions that meet their unique needs and goals. This approach will be criteria based, with defined funding parameters. It will be tested through two family demonstration projects. The learning from these projects will then inform the development of the new system of individualized client-focused supports.

2.8 Priority: Improved Access to Services for Persons with Disabilities

In 2014-2015, the Department will implement a new *Level of Support Policy* that enables staff to leverage the resources available in the community. Under the policy, clients will no longer be denied access if their medical condition, for example diabetes, can be met in the local community.

At the same time, the Department will be working with the Department of Health and Wellness looking for opportunities to harmonize policies, tools and operations, and to integrate service intake.

2.9 Priority: New Legislation for Services for Persons with Disabilities

The *Homes for Special Care Act* is now almost 40 years old and no longer aligns with the new vision for services for persons with disabilities.

New legislation is required to promote ability and inclusion through the establishment of a fuller range of services, supports and funding for individuals with disabilities. The new legislation will need to emphasize supports for people to live in their homes and communities, while providing the Province with a sustainable support model.

In 2014-2015, the Department will begin the research and analysis required to replace the *Homes for Special Care Act*. This will include completing a comprehensive review of the current legislation framework, the legislation in other jurisdictions, and emerging best practices.

2.10 Priority: Accessibility Legislation

Nova Scotia has the highest incidence of self-reported disability in Canada, at about 20% of the population. As the population ages, the incidence of disability will undoubtedly increase. At the same time, the evidence indicates that NS's disabled population face barriers on a number of fronts including: information, employment, and the built environment which serve to hinder full participation and inclusion.

On March 11, 2010, Canada ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, making a commitment to abide by the Convention. The Province supported Canada in ratification, and developing accessibility legislation will move Nova Scotia to the forefront in recognizing the rights of our disabled population.

In 2014-2015, Community Services, as the lead for government, will establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee.

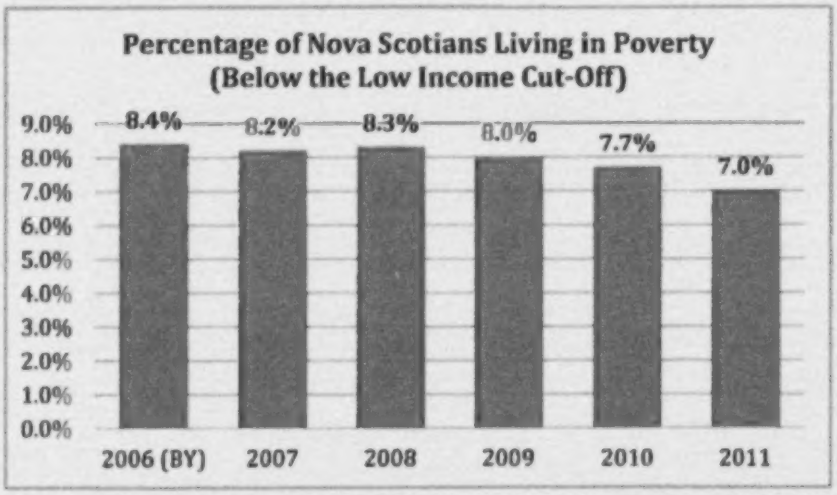
The Committee will include the Disabled Persons Commission, representatives from the disability community and organizations working with disabled persons, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, community transportation providers, retail, service, small business, and housing sectors.

The Committee will be mandated to enage the public through consultation and to bring recommendations forward to Government on the creation of accessibility legislation.

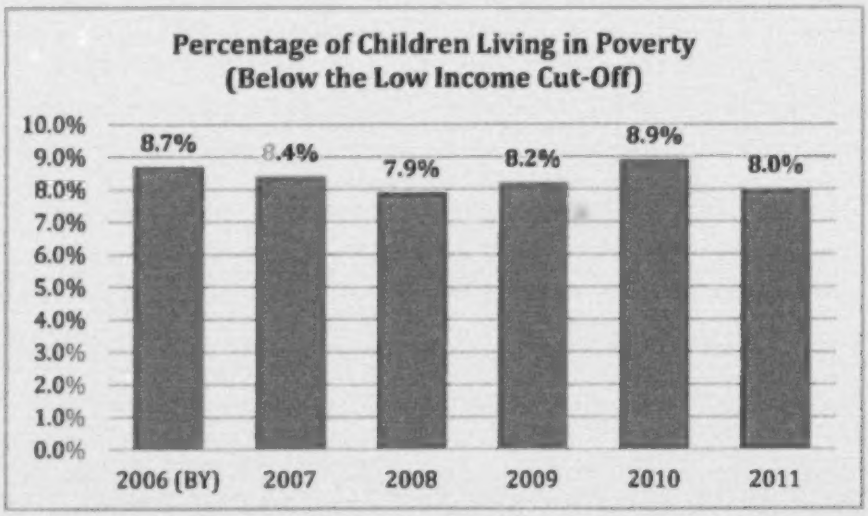
3.0 Budget Context

Community Services			
	2013-2014 Estimate	**2013-2014 Forecast**	**2014-2015 Estimate**
Program & Service Area	($thousands)	($thousands)	($thousands)
Gross Departmental Expenses:			
Senior Management	$1,943,000	$1,844,000	$1,763,000
Corporate Services Unit	8,479,000	8,705,000	9,018,000
Policy and Information Management	8,437,000	8,125,000	7,307,000
Field Offices	13,831,000	13,959,000	14,970,000
Services For Persons with Disabilities	267,592,000	282,638,000	298,843,000
Family and Children's Services	183,771,000	187,330,000	142,536,000
Housing Services	34,818,000	34,936,000	36,498,000
Employment Support and Income Assistance	368,961,000	389,780,000	382,668,000
Housing Authority and Property Operations	8,741,000	8,715,000	9,130,000
NS Advisory Council & Status of Women	0	0	763,000
Total Departmental Expenses	$896,573,000	$936,032,000	$903,496,000
TCA Purchase Requirements	0	0	0
Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs)	1,754.5	1,728.9	1,730.5

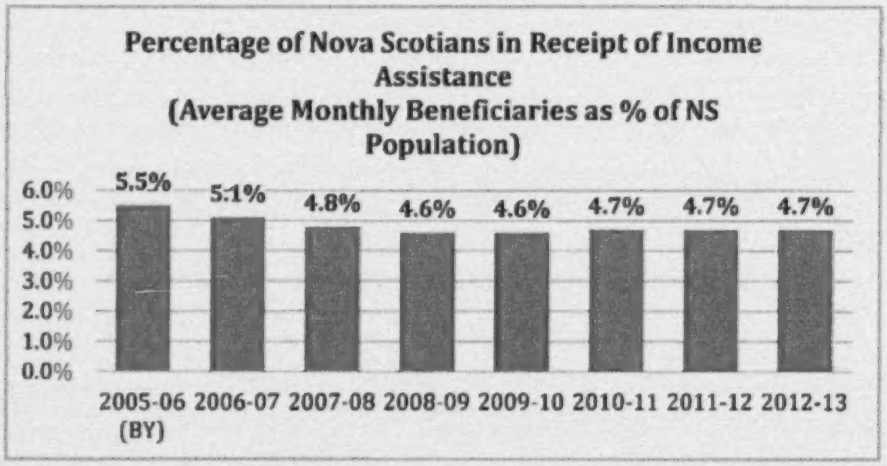
4.0 Performance Measures

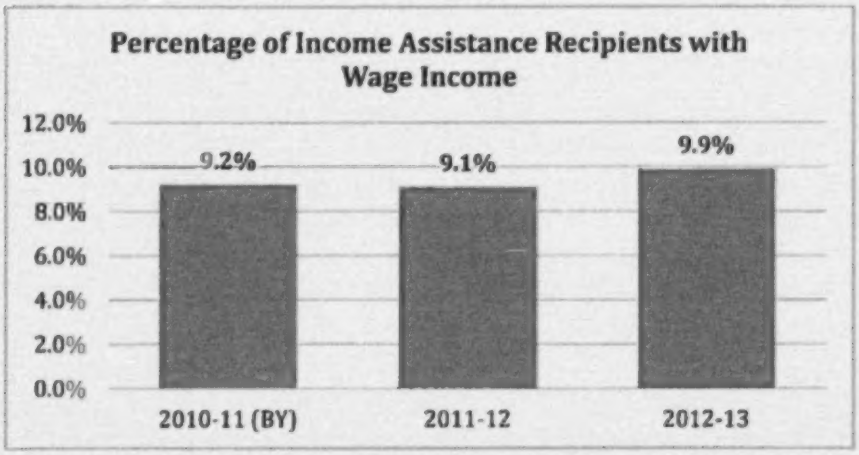
Outcome	Increase the number of Nova Scotians living independent of Income Assistance
Measure	Number and % of NS living in poverty (LICO) - identifies NS who are at or below the poverty line.
Rationale	People living in poverty have little, if any financial flexibility in providing for themselves and their families. A change in circumstance – employment, health, family – can lead to dependency on Income Assistance.
Target	Reduce the number and % of NS living in poverty.
Base Year Data and Trend	
Strategic Actions	• Developing an outcome based model for the ESIA program • Reviewing caseloads to better align client groupings with outcomes • Reviewing IA and ESS policy to support outcomes • Continuing discussions with Labour & Advanced Education to streamline and improve access to employment programming • Continuing to work towards the development of supports that enable clients to gain employment as soon as possible and stay employed. The initial focus is on recipients who have strong potential for employment success, with a goal of helping them to connect to the labour market.

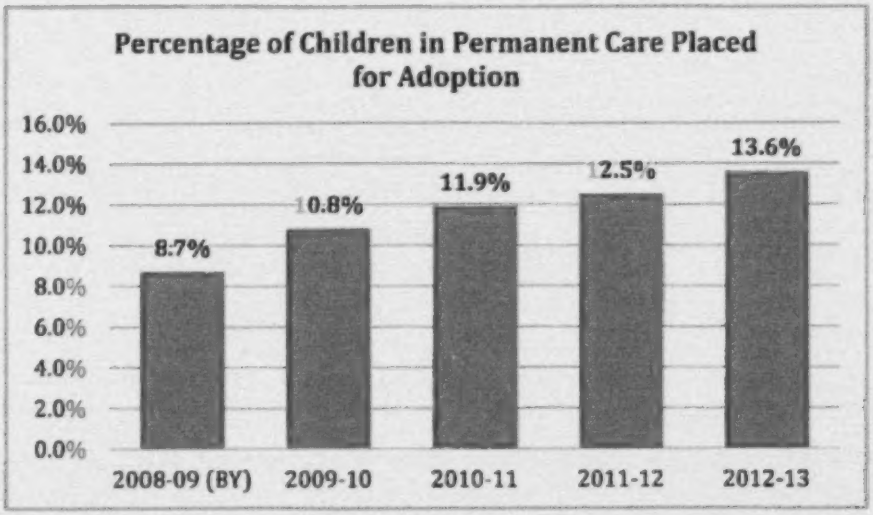
NOVA SCOTIA CANADA

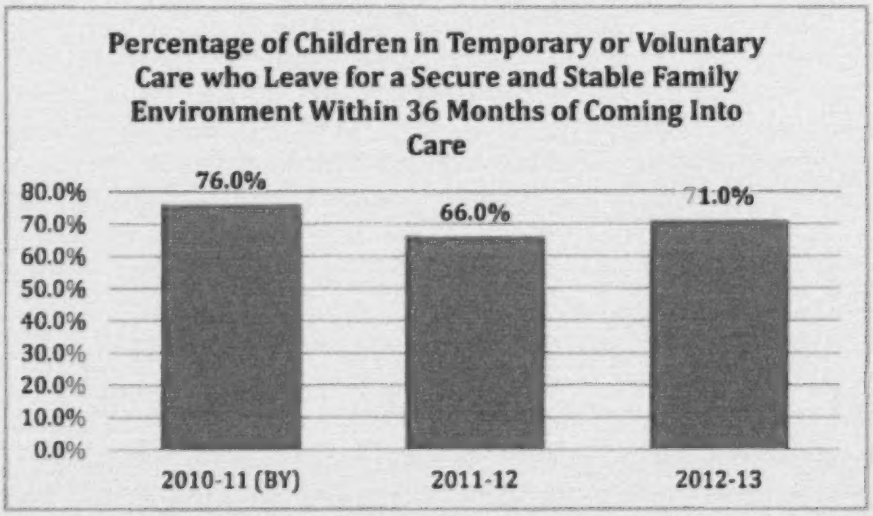
Outcome	Increase the number of Nova Scotians living independent of Income Assistance
Measure	Number and % of children living in poverty (LICO) - identifies children who are at or below the poverty line.
Rationale	Families with children living in poverty lead precarious lives and can easily become dependents of the Income Assistance program.
Target	Reduce the number and % of children living in poverty.
Base Year Data and Trend	
Strategic Actions	Eligibility threshold for Nova Scotia Child Benefit will be extended from $25,000 to $26,000. As a result: • an additional 1,300 children will qualify • upwards of 10,000 children currently in receipt of the NSCB will see a small increase in their benefits.

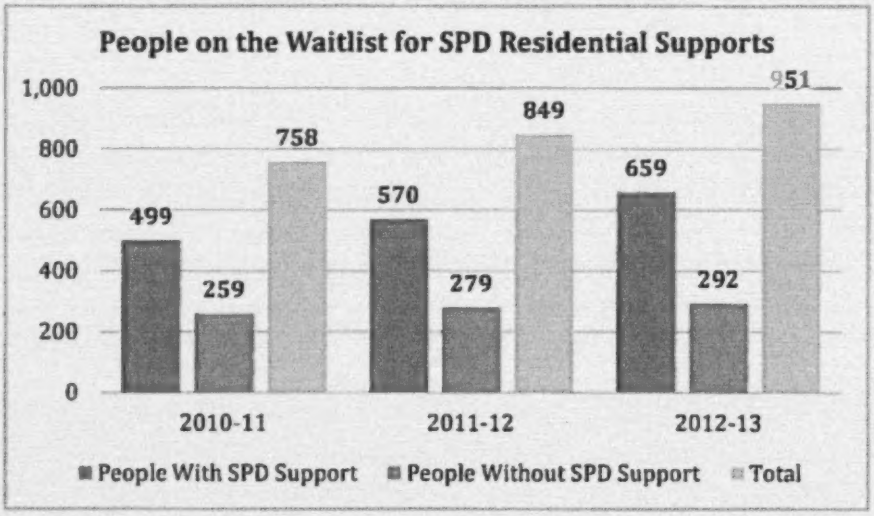
NOVA SCOTIA CANADA

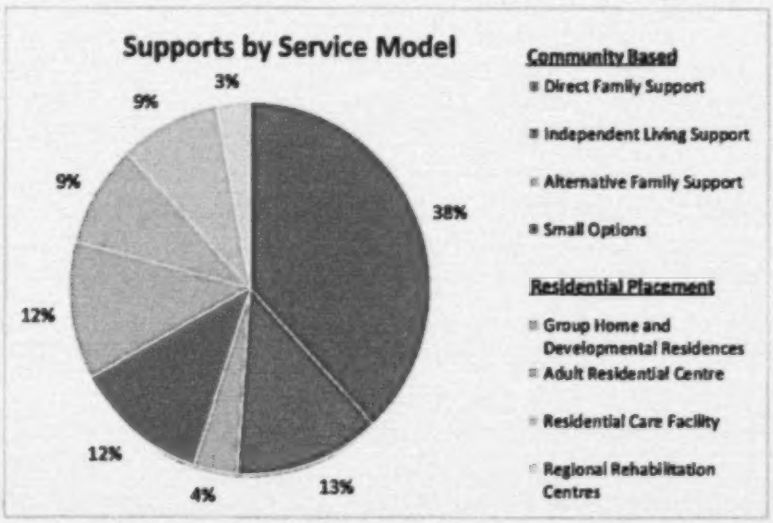
Outcome	Increase the number of Nova Scotians living independent of Income Assistance
Measure	Average monthly beneficiaries as a % of the NS population - represents the % of low income house-holds dependent, in whole or in part, on Income Assistance to meet their basic needs in relation to the NS population.
Rationale	Income is arguably the most important determinant of health, determining in large part the overall health and well-being of families. Health status improves at each step up the income and social hierarchy. Income Assistance by its very nature is designed to help with immediate need. Dependence on Income Assistance ultimately limits the degree of control people have over life circumstances, and their discretion to act. The lower the percentage of the population dependent on IA, the healthier it is and the better prepared it is to cope with societal, familial and economic change.
Target	Reduce the caseload by 220 in 2014-2015.
Base Data and Trend	
Strategic Actions	• Developing an outcome based model for the ESIA program • Reviewing caseloads to better align client groupings with outcomes • Reviewing IA and ESS policy to support outcomes • Continuing discussions with Labour & Advanced Education to streamline and improve access to employment programming • Focus on those recipients who have strong potential for employment success, connecting them to the labour market.

Outcome	Increase the number of Nova Scotians living independent of Income Assistance
Measure	% of Income Assistance (IA) recipients with wage income; an indication of recipients with labour market attachment and their ability to achieve a greater degree of self-reliance and independence.
Rationale	Research indicates that a job is key to income earning potential and financial security.
Target	11% of recipients with wage income in 2014-15.
Base Data and Trend	
Strategic Actions	• Developing an outcome based model for the ESIA program • Reviewing caseloads to better align client groupings with outcomes • Reviewing IA and ESS policy to support outcomes • Continuing discussions with Labour & Advanced Education to streamline and improve access to employment programming • Continuing to work towards the development of supports that enable clients to gain employment as soon as possible and stay employed. The initial focus is on recipients who have strong potential for employment success, with a goal of helping them to connect to the labour market.

Outcome	To improve the educational, justice, health, social and economic determinants of children in care and children of income assistance recipients
Measure	% of children in permanent care placed for adoption.
Rationale	Research is clear - it is in a child's best interest to be placed for adoption as quickly as possible as a secure stable family environment is an important factor in healthy child development.
Target	13.6% of children in permanent care are adopted in 2013-14.
Base Data and Trend	
Strategic Actions	Implement a series of improvements including specialized training for staff, new permanency planning standards, and a new tool to track both children in care and waiting families.

Outcome	To improve the educational, justice, health, social and economic determinants of children in care and children of income assistance recipients
Measure	% of children in temporary or voluntary care who leave for a secure and stable family environment within 36 months of coming into care.
Rationale	A secure stable family environment is a critical factor in healthy child development, educational attainment and overall well-being and social development.
Target	Increase the % of children in care who transition to a secured and stable family environment within 36 months of coming into care
Base Data and Trend	
Strategic Actions	Implement a series of improvements including specialized training for staff, new permanency planning standards, and a new tool to track both children in care and waiting families.

Outcome	Improve opportunities for social inclusion for persons with disabilities
Measure	Number of SPD clients on the waitlist for residential supports
Rationale	Timely access to appropriate residential supports can improve independence and social inclusion.
Target	Reduce the number of clients on the waitlist.
Base Data and Trend	 The total waitlist includes both individuals with no service currently and individuals receiving support through existing programs which either do not meet their needs or are not of their choosing, either by model of service or by location.
Strategic Actions	• Continue SPD Transformation • Implement two family demonstration projects, which may inform a new funding model of support. • Implement a new *Level of Support Policy*, enabling staff to leverage available community resources. Under this policy, clients with medical conditions that can be addressed through local community organizations will be eligible for support.

Outcome	Improve opportunities for social inclusion for persons with disabilities
Measure	% of SPD clients supported in community based options.
Rationale	Community based options enable persons with disabilities to remain in their own homes with family, or alternate home-like settings, and in their communities.
Target	Increase the % of SPD clients supported in community based options.
Base Data and Trend	
Strategic Actions	• Continue SPD Transformation • Work on the development of new legislation that will emphasize supports for people to live in their homes and communities.